

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

HOWARD WALSH,

Plaintiff,

v.

WARDEN STEVEN WESTLEY,

Defendant.

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: Civ. No. 15-493-RGA

Howard Walsh, Howard R. Young Correctional Institution, Wilmington, Delaware,
Pro Se Plaintiff.

MEMORANDUM OPINION

October 26, 2015
Wilmington, Delaware


ANDREWS, U.S. District Judge:

Plaintiff Howard Walsh, an inmate at the Howard R. Young Correctional Institution in Wilmington, Delaware, filed this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. He appears *pro se* and has been granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (D.I. 6). The Court proceeds to review and screen the Complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(a).

Walsh alleges that when he became an inmate at the HRYCI, he advised the medical employee who processed him that he has severe back, neck, knee, and shoulder medical conditions that require strong medication, and that he suffers from a mental disorder, depression, and paranoia. He was placed in a three-man cell that with two bunk beds which required the third inmate to sleep on a mattress on the cell floor. The conditions aggravated Walsh's back and knee conditions and depression. He is currently being treated for his mental condition and is awaiting psychiatric medication. He seeks injunctive relief in the form of a transfer to a single cell as well as compensatory damages.

A federal court may properly dismiss an action *sua sponte* under the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b) if "the action is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief." *Ball v. Famiglio*, 726 F.3d 448, 452 (3d Cir. 2013); see also 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (*in forma pauperis* actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (actions in which prisoner seeks redress from a governmental defendant); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (prisoner actions brought with respect to prison conditions). The Court must accept all factual allegations in a complaint as true and take them in the light most favorable to a *pro se* plaintiff. *Phillips v. County of*

Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008); *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007). Because Plaintiff proceeds *pro se*, his pleading is liberally construed and his complaint, “however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. at 94 (citations omitted).

An action is frivolous if it “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and § 1915A(b)(1), a court may dismiss a complaint as frivolous if it is “based on an indisputably meritless legal theory” or a “clearly baseless” or “fantastic or delusional” factual scenario. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327-28; *Wilson v. Rackmill*, 878 F.2d 772, 774 (3d Cir. 1989); see, e.g., *Deutsch v. United States*, 67 F.3d 1080, 1091-92 (3d Cir. 1995) (holding frivolous a suit alleging that prison officials took an inmate’s pen and refused to give it back).

The legal standard for dismissing a complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1) is identical to the legal standard used when ruling on Rule 12(b)(6) motions. See *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999) (§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)). However, before dismissing a complaint or claims for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 and 1915A, the Court must grant Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint unless amendment would be inequitable or futile. See *Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002).

A well-pleaded complaint must contain more than mere labels and conclusions. See *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662 (2009); *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544

(2007). A plaintiff must plead facts sufficient to show that a claim has substantive plausibility. See *Johnson v. City of Shelby*, ___ U.S. ___, 135 S.Ct. 346, 347 (2014). A complaint may not be dismissed, however, for imperfect statements of the legal theory supporting the claim asserted. See *id.* at 346. When determining whether dismissal is appropriate, the Court must take three steps: “(1) identify[] the elements of the claim, (2) review[] the complaint to strike conclusory allegations, and then (3) look[] at the well-pleaded components of the complaint and evaluat[e] whether all of the elements identified in part one of the inquiry are sufficiently alleged.” *Malleus v. George*, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d Cir. 2011). Elements are sufficiently alleged when the facts in the complaint “show” that the plaintiff is entitled to relief. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)). Deciding whether a claim is plausible will be a “context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.” *Id.*

Here, Walsh names Warden Steven Westley as the only defendant, but the Complaint contains no allegations directed towards him, and therefore it seems likely that Westley was named as a defendant based solely upon his supervisory position. However, it is well established that claims based solely on the theory of *respondeat superior* or supervisor liability are facially deficient. See *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676–77.

Walsh does allege, however, that he informed personnel of his medical conditions, and that his conditions were not considered in his housing assignment, resulting in aggravation of his medical conditions. Hence, it is possible that Walsh may be able to articulate a claim against the defendant, or, even if he has no viable claim against the defendant, he may be able to name alternative defendants. Therefore,

Walsh will be given an opportunity to amend his pleading. *See O'Dell v. United States Gov't*, 256 F. App'x 444 (3d Cir. 2007).

For the above reasons, the Complaint will be dismissed for as frivolous and for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and (ii) and 1915A(b)(1). Plaintiff will be given leave to file an amended complaint.

An appropriate order will be entered.